



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Russia

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions deteriorated for some minority religious faiths while remaining largely the same for others, although government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" continued to seriously disadvantage many religious groups considered nontraditional. Indeed, these restrictions were cited as the basis for the March 2004 court decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow, a decision that had significant negative ramifications for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses during the reporting period. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters are not a source of social tension for most citizens, although many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at the heart of the national identity. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as hostility toward Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox denominations. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it often was difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other religions considered nontraditional. ROC leaders have stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a steady dialogue on religious freedom. The Embassy and consulates work with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly support the implementation of these programs. The Embassy and consulates maintain a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings. Consular officers routinely investigate criminal, customs, and immigration cases involving foreign citizens to determine whether they involve possible violations of religious freedom, and also raise the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He also attended events on major religious holidays and often met with a range of religious leaders. Other Department of State and U.S. Government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 6,592,769 square miles, and its population is approximately 144 million. There are no reliable statistics that break down the population by denomination. Available information suggests slightly more than half of the residents consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority are not regular churchgoers. There are an estimated 14 to 20 million Muslims, constituting approximately 14 percent of the population and forming the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Urals region -- which includes Tatarstan and Bashkortostan -- and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia have Muslim populations as well. The Muslim communities in the Volga-Urals region and the North Caucasus are culturally and theologically distinct from one another, which has led to a split in the Muslim community. Muslims in the Volga-Urals region tend to view Islam through a cultural prism, whereas Islam in the North Caucasus is increasingly politicized.

By most estimates, Protestants constitute the third largest group of believers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews remain (0.5 percent of the population) following large-scale emigration over the last 2 decades; the Federation of Jewish Communities

(FJC) estimates that up to 500,000 Jews live in Moscow and 100,000 in St. Petersburg. These estimates significantly exceed the results of the official government census. Between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews live in the so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast (region), located in the Far East. Buddhism is traditional to three regions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya, and the Buddhist Association of Russia estimates there are between 1.5 and 2 million Buddhists. In some areas, such as Yakutia and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside majority religions.

According to the most recent Ministry of Justice (MOJ) statistics available, there were 21,664 registered religious organizations as of May 2004. The figures show an increase of approximately 1,000 registered organizations since 2002 and more than 5,000 since 1997. The MOJ recorded the number of registered religious groups as follows: Russian Orthodox Church--11,525 groups, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church--41, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad--45, True Orthodox Church--24, Russian Orthodox Free Church--16, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)--11, Old Believers--284 (representing 4 different Old Believer denominations), Roman Catholic--248, Greek Catholic--5, Armenian Apostolic--60, Muslim--3,537, Buddhist--192, Jewish--267 (divided among Orthodox and Reform groups), Baptist--979, Pentecostal--1,467, Seventh-day Adventist--646, other evangelical and charismatic groups--134, Lutheran--219 (divided among 4 groups), Apostolic--81, Methodist--105, Reformist--5, Presbyterian--176, Anglican--1, Jehovah's Witnesses--386, Mennonite--9, Salvation Army--32, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)(Mormon) Church--50, Unification Church--9, Church of the "Sovereign" Icon of the Mother of God--27, Molokane--28, Dukhobor--1, Church of the Last Covenant--11, Church of Christ--26, non-denominational Christian--24, Scientologist--2, Hindu--1, Krishna--80, Baha'i--20, Tantric--2, Taoist--6, Assyrian--2, Sikh--1, Shamanist--14, Karaite--1, Zoroastrian--1, Spiritual Unity (Tolstoyan)--1, Living Ethic (Rerikhian)--1, pagan--11, other confessions--216.

The number of registered religious organizations does not reflect the entire demography of religious believers. For example, due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register or reregister.

An estimated 500 (official estimate) to more than 9,000 (Council of Muftis' estimate) Muslim organizations remain unregistered; some reportedly are defunct, but many, according to the Council of Muftis, have concluded that they did not require legal status and have postponed applying for financial reasons. Registration figures probably also underestimate the number of Pentecostal churches. As of May, the Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith estimated that there were nearly 2,000 registered and unregistered Pentecostal churches, 62 regional associations, and about 300,000 believers. As of May 2004, the official number of registered Pentecostal organizations was 1,467. The difference in numbers can be explained by the fact that many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered.

Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. The Unification Church reported that the drop in its registered organizations from 17 in 2003 to 5 as of the end of the reporting period was due to local authorities hindering the church's attempt to reregister its local organizations. The Moscow Monthly Friends' Meeting (Quakers) is an officially registered organization, although as of June, it apparently was registered under "other faiths," as there was no Quaker organization listed in the MOJ registry.

In practice, only a small minority of citizens identify strongly with any religion. Many who identify themselves as members of a faith participate in religious life rarely or not at all.

Representatives of Muslim religious organizations operate, as do a large number of foreign missionaries, many from Protestant denominations.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. The Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect this provision.

The 1990 law on freedom of religion helped facilitate a revival of religious activity. The 1990 law declared all religions equal before the law, prohibited government interference in religion, and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required, but groups could obtain a number of advantages by registering, such as the ability to establish official places of worship or benefit from tax exemptions.

A new law in 1997, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, replaced the 1990 law. Although the 1997 law does not recognize a state religion, its preamble recognizes Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage, and also recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." Public opinion widely considers Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism to be the only religions "traditional" to the country.

Neither the Constitution nor the 1997 law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions; however, many politicians and public figures argue for closer cooperation with them, above all with the ROC's Moscow Patriarchate. The ROC has entered into a number of agreements, some formal, others informal, with government ministries on such matters as

guidelines for public education, religious training for military personnel, and law enforcement and customs decisions, giving the ROC far greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the FSB, and the army. In November 2004, the ROC and the MVD extended an earlier agreement pursuant to which the two entities cooperated in efforts to combat extremism, terrorism, and drug addiction. Such efforts included, for example, ROC support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones and the holding of religious services for those serving there.

Many government officials and citizens equate Russian Orthodoxy with the national identity. This belief appears to have manifested itself in the church-state relationship. For example, the ROC has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations, and other bodies, such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. Not all of the details of these agreements are accessible, but available information indicates that the ROC receives more favorable treatment than other denominations. Public statements by some government officials and anecdotal evidence from religious minorities suggest that increasingly since 1999, the ROC has enjoyed a status that approaches official. For example, during President Vladimir Putin's April State of the Nation address, Patriarch Aleksey II was seated in a place of honor between Prime Minister Fradkov and the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, whereas the leaders of the other traditional religions were seated behind him. Election campaign teams often include the ROC clergy who frequently play a special role at official events at both the local and national level, and who support a close relationship with the State. Nonetheless, policymakers remain divided on the State's proper relationship with the ROC and other churches.

The Rodina Duma faction and single-mandate deputies representing the People's Party have consistently supported a more official status for the ROC. The President, who, in contrast with his predecessors has openly spoken of his belief in God, acknowledged major Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist religious holidays with greetings to those communities. He also meets periodically -- most recently in September 2004 -- with members of the President's Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations, which includes representatives of traditional religions, and other major religious communities, such as the Protestants and Catholics, to discuss anti-terrorism issues.

The 1997 law ostensibly targets so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious "cults," by making it difficult for members of less well-established religions to set up religious organizations. Many officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches speak of the need to protect the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include Protestant and newer religious movements. The 1997 law is very complex, with many ambiguous provisions, and it creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. Most significantly, the law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations." A religious "group" is not registered and consequently does not have the legal status of a juridical person; it may not open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals and among the armed forces. However, individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In this way, groups theoretically are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services; however, in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encounter significant difficulty in exercising these rights.

The 1997 law provides that a group that has existed for 15 years and has at least 10 citizen members may register as a "local organization." It acquires the status of a juridical person and receives certain legal advantages. A group with three functioning local organizations in different regions may found a "centralized organization," which has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without meeting the 15-year-rule requirement.

The 1997 law required all religious organizations registered under the more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice, this process, which involves simultaneous registration at the federal and local levels, requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations began to reregister soon after publication of the 1997 regulations; however, some Pentecostal congregations refused to register out of philosophical conviction, and some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering -- according to spokespersons for the two most prominent muftis.

Under a 1999 amendment to the law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for reregistration, an estimated 2,095 religious groups were subject to dissolution, and the MOJ reported that by May 2002, approximately 980 of them had been dissolved. The MOJ asserted that most such organizations were defunct, but religious minorities and NGOs contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution have decreased in recent years, possibly because those who fought dissolution have already taken their cases to court; however, a few groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, and Scientologists are still fighting their cases through the court system.

In November 2004, the President signed amendments to the tax code that exempted religious organizations from paying land taxes.

In January, the 1997 law was amended to conform to a new law on state registration of other legal entities. The amended law requires all registered local religious organizations to inform the Federal Registration Service Department (FRSD) within 3 days of a change in its leadership or legal address. If a local organization fails to meet this requirement on two or more occasions, the

FRSD can file suit to have the organization dissolved and stricken from the registry. Some denominations with numerous local organizations fear that compliance with this law will be highly burdensome.

The 1997 law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. The law has not been used to ban many groups to date. However, in a notable exception, the decision of a Moscow court judge in June 2004 to uphold on appeal the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses garnered much media coverage and prompted an upswing in restrictions on Jehovah's Witnesses. As of mid-May, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses groups in 397 local communities in 72 regions, but problems with registration continued in other communities, notably Moscow.

A lack of specific guidelines accompanying the 1997 law contributed to inconsistent application at the local and regional levels. Local officials, reportedly often influenced either by close relations with local ROC authorities or the FSB, sometimes refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. There are indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some minority religious groups.

The LDS Church succeeded in registering 50 local religious organizations as of the end of the reporting period. In 2003, the LDS Church was registered in Chelyabinsk following a series of rejections of its application for registration and a lawsuit. The group has neither been able to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan since 1998, nor in Tver despite numerous attempts.

Although the Constitutional Court found earlier rulings by Moscow courts dissolving the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army to be unconstitutional, the Moscow Oblast MOJ had not reregistered the organization by the end of the reporting period, and two of the court judgments whereby the applicant branch was legally dissolved remained in force, despite the ruling of the Constitutional Court. In a separate case, the Presnenskiy District court ruling against the Salvation Army's registration has not yet been upheld, and according to the Salvation Army's Moscow office, it continued to operate based on documents filed under the old statute. In the preface of the Presnenskiy court's ruling, the Salvation Army is referred to as a "militarized organization." A textbook on religious culture prepared for use in schools repeats this definition of the Salvation Army, which it calls a "sect." The Slavic Center for Law and Justice (SCLJ) has agreed to help the Moscow organization get the Presnenskiy Court ruling repealed and is working with the Salvation Army. The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in June 2004 that the group's complaint that it had not been allowed to reregister was admissible; however, the court declared the rest of the complaints inadmissible. As of the end of the reporting period, a decision on the merits was pending.

The Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology continued to be denied reregistration by the Moscow authorities and faced threats of dissolution. The Scientologists countered the MOJ contention that the Church had failed to reregister by the deadline by citing the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling in favor of the Salvation Army. Despite the court ruling against dissolution, the Government filed a supervisory appeal to the Supreme Court, which was granted, and the case was remanded back to the trial court for new proceedings, where the court found in the Government's favor. In February, a Moscow appeals court ordered Moscow Oblast officials to permit the church to submit an application for reregistration and to examine the application on its merits. Prior to this decision, the Church of Scientology had filed a suit with the ECHR against the dissolution order, which the ECHR found admissible in October 2004.

In response to local authorities' repeated refusal to register the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology, the Church filed suit. A hearing scheduled for May 26 was postponed for procedural reasons until June 24; due to the illness of the presiding judge, the June 24 hearing was postponed indefinitely. Local authorities have impeded the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Starting in 2002, the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center initiated a series of proceedings to appeal a dissolution order issued by the Khabarovsk regional Ministry of Justice based on money laundering charges. While these proceedings were taking place, the Church of Scientology formed and registered a new organization in Khabarovsk, which has been operating without interference from the regional authorities. The Church of Scientology in Surgut City filed a suit with the ECHR against the refusal of officials to register the church, a suit which the ECHR found admissible in June.

The Council of Muftis indicated that registration is not an issue for Muslim organizations, and some regional Muslim organizations continued to operate without registration, such as the 39 of 47 Muslim communities in the Stavropol region that operate without registration despite affiliation with a recognized regional Muslim administration. The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have laws banning extremist religious activities, described as "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. The regional government in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the strongest Islamic areas, continued to encourage a Tatar cultural and religious revival, while avoiding instituting confrontational religious policies. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Tatarstan Government has funded the construction of some 1,000 mosques and several dozen Islamic schools.

In June 2004, deputies at the State Duma rejected a bill that would criminalize "Wahhabism" and other "extremist" activities because, among other things, the term "Wahhabi" was said to be too broad a category and not defined well enough to include in law. Disagreement between the heads of the two main Muslim spiritual boards continued, with their separate supporters leveling accusations of Wahhabism, and the Government exploiting this disagreement for political purposes.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they are barred from conducting services and other religious activities unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices have opened without registering or have been accredited to a registered religious

organization.

A 2002 "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the MFA to the MVD, appeared to disrupt the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers. Immediately after implementation of this law, nontraditional groups reported problems receiving long-term visas, although the number of such problems appeared to decrease during the reporting period. The FSB inserts itself into matters dealing with visas and religion, particularly where groups it views as "dangerous cults and sects" are concerned, distinctions that it reserves for some of these nontraditional groups. For example, an FSB representative, who acted as the official delegate at a June 2004 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes, presented an official statement that labeled Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas as examples of xenophobic cults that propagated "fanatical devotion and rejection of other religions" on their websites. The websites that were listed as evidence, however, proved to be non-existent.

Working groups within the Government continued to focus on introducing possible amendments to the controversial 1997 law. Duma Deputy Aleksandr Chuyev is one of several officials who have proposed legislative changes to formally grant special status to "traditional" religious denominations.

Prior to July 2004, a representative from the federal MOJ reported that investigations into the activities of more than 2,000 religious groups had been conducted, leading to 1,900 notifications of various violations. In addition, the MOJ representative reported that 246 petitions were sent to courts requesting the dissolution of religious organizations, and reported that more than 4,000 monuments and more than 15,000 museum exhibits were returned to the ROC.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintained consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the 1997 law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion, which includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continue to deal with the Presidential Administration through a body known as the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academics who are specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major nontraditional faiths.

Representatives of minority religions have expressed the view that some government officials, particularly in the security services, believe that minority religions -- especially Muslims, but also Roman Catholics, some Protestant denominations and other groups -- constitute security threats that require greater monitoring and possibly greater control.

In 2004, Smolensk and Kursk Oblast authorities adopted laws restricting missionary activity. The Kursk law was based on a 2001 law that was passed in neighboring Belgorod. Under these laws, foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless specifically allowed to do so according to their visas. In 2001, the Belgorod Oblast court ruled to strike the article of the law that stated that groups receiving repeated violations would be banned, and there have been no reports of a reversal of the court's decision. Despite passage of the Belgorod, Smolensk, and Kursk laws, there were no reports of enforcement.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, provide regional officials with opportunities to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attribute discriminatory practices at the local level to the greater susceptibility of local governments than the federal government to discriminatory attitudes and lobbying by local majority religious groups. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but usually these instances were resolved quickly. Although President Putin's expressed desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening of the rule of law initially led to some improvements in religious freedom in the regions, as local laws were brought into conformity with federal laws, many localities appear to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the Federal Government chooses to intervene, it works through the Procuracy, MOJ, Presidential Administration, and the courts to force regions to comply with federal law or not, depending on the political stakes, as with the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses and Salvation Army cases. The Government only occasionally intervenes to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

The legal code includes strong hate-crime laws. An anti-extremism bill was adopted in 2003 with the goal of reducing religious and ethnic intolerance and limiting the activities of ultra-right-wing organizations. The legislation prohibits advocating in public speech the superiority of any group based on religion, race, nationality, language, or other attributes; however, the law does not restrict websites that contain such speech. Some observers expressed particular concern about the effect of the legislation on religious freedom. Indeed, in 2003, authorities in Samara made use of the anti-extremism legislation to cancel the registration of a Buddhist community and the Church of the Last Covenant, and to refuse registration to communities of Scientologists and the Unification Church.

The Unification Church reported that the requirements of a broad range of government agencies, involving fire inspection, tax inspection, and even epidemiological inspection, unduly complicated the registration process.

Anti-Semitic statements have been legally prosecuted. While the Government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and supports legal action against anti-Semitic acts, the reluctance of some lower-level officials to call such acts anything other than "hooliganism" remains problematic. There have been multiple cases of anti-Semitic statements from government authorities in

some of the country's regions, specifically in Krasnodar Kray and Kursk Oblast.

President Putin met regularly during the reporting period with Rabbi Berl Lazar, one of two chief rabbis. In a March meeting, President Putin pledged to make the fight against anti-Semitism a Government priority, and in an October 2004 meeting, he expressed support for the revival of Jewish communities. He also denounced anti-Semitism in several press interviews, usually to foreign media or while traveling outside the country. In April, Rabbi Lazar met with Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov to discuss anti-Semitism and the state of Moscow's Jewish community. Luzhkov expressed concern about the growing number of extremist organizations and pledged the city's cooperation in fighting extremism. In 2003, President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov each met with major foreign Jewish organization leaders. In April, President Putin became the first Russian or Soviet President ever to visit the State of Israel.

In March 2004, prominent Rabbis Berl Lazar and Pinchas Goldschmidt came together to call on the Government to better define the meaning of "extremism." Lazar and Goldschmidt said that law enforcers were prone to dismiss anti-Semitic actions as simple hooliganism to avoid calling attention to their region as extremist-oriented and/or to consciously protect extremist groups with which they sympathized.

Anti-Semitic sentiments have also been expressed by members of the State Duma and other prominent figures. On January 24, some 500 persons, including 19 members of the Duma representing the Rodina bloc and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), wrote to the Prosecutor General asking that he conduct an investigation of Jewish organizations and to initiate proceedings to ban them. The letter charged that a Russian translation of a compilation of ancient Jewish law, the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh, incited hatred against non-Jews; the letter accused Jews, among other things, of ritual murders. The MFA condemned the letter on January 25, as did President Putin in remarks delivered in Krakow on January 27, where he was attending ceremonies marking the liberation of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. On February 4, the Duma passed a resolution condemning the January 24 letter. In an apparent response, some 5,000 persons, reportedly including a number of ROC clerics and some prominent cultural figures, signed a similar anti-Semitic letter sent to the Prosecutor General on March 21. A Moscow district prosecutor opened an investigation into the Jewish organization that published the translation, as well as into charges brought by Jewish and human rights organizations that the letters violated federal laws against ethnic incitement, but closed both investigations on June 10 without bringing charges. Later in June, for unknown reasons, the Moscow city prosecutor ordered the district prosecutor to reopen the investigation into the Jewish organization. After an international outcry, the prosecutor closed the investigation again on June 29.

Originally registered with well-known neo-Nazis on its electoral list, the Rodina bloc attempted to improve its image by rejecting openly neo-Nazi candidates; however, it allowed others known for their anti-Semitic views to remain.

State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the LDPR are also known for their anti-Semitic rhetoric and statements. In earlier years, LDPR supporters rallied during Moscow's May Day celebration, carrying anti-Semitic signs and speaking out against what they called "world Zionism," but there were no reports of this in 2005.

Some members of the KPRF also made anti-Semitic statements. For example, Krasnodar Kray Senator Nikolai Kondratenko blamed Zionism and Jews in general for many of the country's problems and blamed Soviet Jews for helping to destroy the Soviet Union, according to a 2003 article in "Volgogradskaya Tribuna," and again in a June/July 2004 conference in Beirut.

There have been multiple cases of anti-Semitic statements from government authorities in some regions, specifically in Krasnodar Kray and Kursk Oblast, as well as in the State Duma.

In March 2004, then Minister for Nationalities Vladimir Zorin brought extremism to the forefront of public attention by calling anti-Semitism and xenophobia major threats to the country. Zorin called for stricter enforcement of the existing statutes outlawing extremism, such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code (which criminalizes the incitement of ethnic hatred). He also called for more programs to educate the public about anti-Semitism and to promote tolerance. In addition, Minister of Internal Affairs Rashid Nurgaliyev became the first high-level government official to acknowledge the existence of right-wing extremist youth groups. Combating this extremism was one of the top priority tasks for the MVD and FSB, he said. These statements marked a positive step toward the Government's willingness to prosecute those who commit hate crimes, although few concrete moves have been made to solve many high-profile cases.

The Government does not require religious instruction in schools but it continues to allow public usage of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. The Government has backed off from a controversial proposal to introduce an optional course on the national level, "Foundations of Orthodox Culture," using a textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, which included descriptions of some minority religions that they found objectionable. Although still used by some schools, the Ministry of Education rejected funding for another edition and further circulation. Nevertheless, a significant number of regions continue to offer a course on Orthodoxy in public schools; for example, on February 15, the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast Ministry of Education announced that the course would be taught in up to 100 schools in that region beginning in the fall. Some regions have published their own textbooks, for use in public school religion classes, which include disparaging comments about "nontraditional" religions. For example, the textbook "A History of Orthodox Culture in Smolensk," recommended for use in public schools by the Smolensk Oblast Department of Education and Youth Policy, included pejorative references to Protestants.

There were no further developments with respect to Education Minister Andrey Fursenko's plan to introduce nationally a new

school subject entitled "History of Religion," which would teach the history of all religions. As no final decision has been reached, the issue continues to be left to individual regions, some of which have begun offering such a class.

The Constitution mandates the availability of alternative military service to those who refuse to bear arms for religious or other reasons of conscience. The law on alternative civil service took effect in January 2004, and two supplements to the law were issued in March 2004. The first supplement listed 722 organizations to which draftees may be assigned for the alternative service, and the second listed 283 activities that draftees were permitted to perform. In June 2004, Prime Minister Fradkov signed regulations on the implementation of the law on alternative civilian service. According to the regulations, the standard alternative service term is 42 months -- versus the regular service term of 24 months -- but the term will be shortened to 36 months if the draftee is assigned to a military organization. The required service for university graduates is 21 and 18 months in these situations. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments (1.75 times longer than regular military service) acts as a punishment for those who choose to exercise their religious or moral convictions.

The authorities permit Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases. They give some Protestant groups access to military facilities on a more limited basis; however, Islamic services are largely banned, and Muslim conscripts generally are not given time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Muslim recruits serving in the army report being subjected to insults and abuse on the basis of religion.

The office of Federal Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin contains a department dedicated to religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints from individuals and groups about infringements of religious freedom. Some human rights groups, such as Soldiers' Mothers, expressed their satisfaction with Lukin's early performance on the job. Others, such as Memorial, expressed concern about June 2004 reports that Lukin and the MVD agreed to assign a Ministry representative to all human rights organizations. A Moscow Bureau of Human Rights (MBHR) official noted that while Lukin's reports on human rights violations were professional and detailed, his apparent loyalty to the Putin administration compromised his independence.

Avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential District Representatives (Polpreds) include sub offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations; however, it is at these administrative levels that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the SCLJ, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 law. The academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

In June 2004, the federally targeted program on tolerance and anti-extremism was closed ahead of its original 2005 end date. The program called for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation on extremism, mandatory training for public officials to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and new materials for use in public educational institutions. Presidential Human Rights Commission Chair Ella Pamfilova expressed shock over the decision to terminate the tolerance program and called it "political nearsightedness." A representative involved with the program remarked that the implications of the program's early cancellation were still unclear, but that several Government leaders have continued to express interest in attending tolerance conferences organized by a group that sponsors the program.

Since 1993, officials have encouraged a revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. After denying at least three previous visa requests -- apparently in order to avoid offending China -- in November 2004, the Government granted the Dalai Lama a visa.

In 2003, President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to improve relations between the ROC and the Vatican. Later that year, Putin met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, a move that both sides viewed as a positive step toward improved understanding between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches. However, the ROC continues to complain vociferously about the Roman Catholic presence in traditionally non-Catholic areas. On June 22, Roman Catholic Cardinal Walter Kaspar, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, traveled to the country to discuss interchurch relations with Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who also serves as the president of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of Foreign Ecclesiastical Relations. Their discussions focused principally on the status of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church.

Foreign religious and other workers have been deterred or prohibited from entering war zones in the North Caucasus, and information about religious activity in the area therefore is less available and reliable than for other regions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Critics continue to identify several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience as providing a basis for actions that restrict religious freedom. In particular, they criticize the provisions allowing the Government to ban religious organizations, requiring organizations to reregister and establishing procedures for their dissolution. Critics also cite provisions that not only limit the rights of religious "groups," but also require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for "organization" status. Although the situation is somewhat better for groups that were registered before 1997, new groups are

hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal government has attempted to apply the 1997 law in a liberal fashion, and critics direct most of their allegations of restrictive practices at local officials. Implementation of the 1997 law varies widely, depending on the attitude of local offices of the MOJ (responsible for registration, dissolution, and bans).

In February 2004, the Procuracy of Moscow's Northern Circuit banned the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that it was a "threat to society," a basis for banning under the 1997 law. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. In June 2004, a ban on all organized activity by Moscow's 10,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses took effect, marking one of the first times that such a ban has been implemented under the 1997 law. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the ruling, and although the judge admitted that members did not incite violent religious hatred, he did accuse the organization of "forcing families to disintegrate, violating the equal rights of parents in the upbringing of their children, violating the Constitution and freedom of conscience, encouraging suicide, and inciting citizens to refuse both military and alternative service." On May 31, the Witnesses were advised by telephone that a subsequent appeal, to the Presidium of the Moscow City Court, had been dismissed, although as of the end of the reporting period, they had not received official documentation of the dismissal or an explanation of its grounds. The ban, although applying only to Moscow, has set a precedent for the 133,000 Jehovah's Witnesses practicing in the country, creating nationwide ramifications for the Witnesses.

After the 2004 decisions to ban the group in Moscow, many local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country reported that rental contracts on their buildings had been cancelled, or appeared to be at increased risk of cancellation. In June 2004, in Sochi, Jehovah's Witnesses were denied access to a meeting venue after the FSB pressured the landlord; the decision to deny access was later reversed and the meeting took place. In Moscow Oblast, which is a separate jurisdiction from the city of Moscow, the Witnesses reported the cancellation of rentals by a hotel conference center, a cinema and a cultural center, each of which previously had been used by congregations of Witnesses.

Some landlords outside of the city of Moscow appeared to believe that they were obligated by law under the Moscow ban to cancel rental contracts with the Witnesses, as seen by incidents in Roshchino (Leningrad Oblast), Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Khabarovsk and Ufa. For example, on March 24, under pressure from his superiors, the Director of the Palace of Culture in the village of Roshchino forced a group of Witnesses to change the venue of a religious celebration that had been scheduled to take place in the palace. In November 2004, the Witnesses reported that the East Administrative Circuit Police Department in Moscow had ordered the cancellation of a series of conventions scheduled for the Universal Sports and Performance Complex. Religious assemblies held by Jehovah's Witnesses were also disrupted or prevented in Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Khabarovsk, and Ufa in the period covered by this report. In 2004, in Krasnoyarsk, the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to rent facilities only with assistance from a local expert on religious issues.

In some cases the Witnesses reported that authorities consulted with the Russian Orthodox Church to determine whether to approve their requests. The Witnesses report that Father Valeriy of the Archangelsk Orthodox Eparchy exerted pressure on Archangelsk authorities to prevent the Witnesses from holding a district convention scheduled for August, similar to the Church's influence in Vladimir in 2004, in which venue use depended on approval from a local Russian Orthodox priest. The authorities in Stavropol Kray have not permitted Jehovah's Witnesses to rent appropriate facilities for their district conventions since 2003, when officials cancelled a convention on alleged security grounds, and obstructed another convention to be conducted in sign language for 700 hearing-impaired persons. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed a claim against the police for the disruption of this event, but the trial and appeals courts held against the Witnesses.

On April 7, the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk City Court dismissed the claim filed by the city prosecutor to declare invalid the registration of the local Witnesses' organization's title to the unfinished Kingdom Hall in that city. The Witnesses subsequently finished construction of the building and are now able to use it for religious services, although they must still complete their registration of the finished structure and of their right to the land on which it is built. A local Russian Orthodox priest, Fr. Oleg Stenyayev, previously had suggested that the building be confiscated and given to local Muslims, a suggestion to which Vice Governor Georgiy Karlov responded favorably.

In other instances, the Witnesses have succeeded in appeals to overturn dissolution orders issued by lower courts. In November 2004, the Primorskiy Kray Court overturned an October dissolution order issued by a lower court against the Witnesses' organization in the city of Luchegorsk. In October 2004, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan overturned a September ruling by a court in Naberezhniye Chelnye dissolving the Witnesses' organization in that city.

In March 2004, the Bashkortostan Supreme Court upheld a previous ruling against the local Scientologists' Dianetics Center after local authorities accused it of conducting illegal medical and educational activities and of "harming people;" the Center denied conducting any medical activities. In May 2004, the Civil Law Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation upheld the decision of the Bashkortostan Court. To date, the Ufa center has not been dissolved, but it has been forced to suspend all activities and to leave its premises. The Scientologists have formed a parallel Dianetics group in Ufa, but the negative publicity associated with its predecessor and an ongoing investigation by the local prosecutor have hindered its activities. The group leads "a semi-underground" existence.

Following the Supreme Court's 2003 decision to uphold a lower court's dissolution order, the Faith in Action Bible College in Vladivostok ceased operations. The college had been accused of conducting religious education without a license, though lawyers for the school argued that conducting religious education did not require a license as long as the school did not issue diplomas or certificates.

There has been no progress in the investigation of the January 2004 explosion in a building belonging to a congregation of unregistered Baptists (also called "Initsiativniki") in Tula. The authorities have long been suspicious of the Initsiativniki, whose complete refusal to cooperate with the Soviet authorities led to their split in 1961 from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The Tula Baptist community believed the explosion was a terrorist act, as community members had been receiving threats from unknown persons. Although local law enforcement authorities attributed the explosion to a natural gas leak, the local gas company reportedly found no gas residue at the site.

Jehovah's Witnesses cited five child custody cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion. A court in Primorskiy Kray cited the Moscow ban in reversing a lower court's decision to award custody of a child to its mother, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. In August 2004, the judge in a child custody case reportedly wrote to the Moscow court that ordered the banning of the Witnesses to request a copy of its decision. In November 2004, the father in a child custody case referred to the Moscow banning decision as one of the factors supporting his claim for custody. The Dagestan custody case initiated in 2002 and mentioned in last year's report is still pending, contrary to our report last year. Some cases were resolved in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses mother. See the Improvements section.

Human rights groups and religious minorities have criticized the Procurator General for encouraging legal action against some minority religions and for giving an imprimatur of authority to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the LDS Church, and others. The FSB, the Procurator, and other agencies have conducted campaigns of harassment against Muslims, Roman Catholics, some Protestant groups, and newer religious movements. Religious groups and organizations faced investigations for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, landlords were pressured to renege on contracts, and in some cases the security services are thought to have influenced the MOJ to reject registration applications.

The LDS Church in the Far East has not reported visits by law enforcement officials during this reporting period, in contrast with the previous reporting period.

Forum 18 reported that the FSB had summoned the leadership of the Old Believers on the eve of their church leadership election in February 2004 to indicate the FSB's preference for a particular candidate who ultimately was not elected. There were no reports of further FSB contact with the group.

As reported in 2003, law enforcement personnel monitored some Muslim groups in Sverdlovsk Oblast, particularly focusing on their statements regarding the conflict in Chechnya. No update on the monitoring was available at the close of the reporting period.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country, although such problems appeared to be decreasing for some groups. Authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report. During the last reporting period, the Forum 18 news service reported that there were over 30 cases of foreign religious workers of various faiths who had been barred since the mid-1990s.

In March the Government denied entry to high-ranking British and Danish Salvation Army officials, Major Robert Garrard and Colonel Karl Lydholm, who sought to attend a church congress. In explaining its decision to deny entry, the Moscow city branch of the federal MVD cited the provision of law under which foreigners may be denied entry "in the interests of state security."

Visa problems appeared to decrease for some but not all groups during the reporting period. Several groups, including the LDS and Catholic churches, reported that most of their clergy were issued one-year visas. Foreign religious workers without residency permits typically must go abroad once a year to renew their visas, usually back to their countries of origin; some receive multiple-entry visas or are able to extend their stays. Since the enactment of a Law on Foreigners and subsequent amendments that took effect in 2002, some religious workers reported difficulty in obtaining visas with terms longer than three months (even if they had previously held visas with one-year validity). The curtailed validity has led some religious groups to begin shuttling their missionaries in and out of the country every three months, presenting a financial, psychological, and spiritual hardship for such groups. Missionaries under such restrictions must pay for travel back to their countries of origin, often not knowing if they may return. As a result, many missionary groups must find and maintain two workers for every position if one is to be available for ministry while the other is outside the country applying for a visa renewal.

Although there were no reported expulsions of Roman Catholic priests during the reporting period, there was a report of one foreign priest whose visa was not renewed. Also, Father Jerzy Steckiewicz, leader of the parish in Kaliningrad, was granted a tourist visa valid only for that region, rather than a religious visa, making it impossible for him to travel to other parts of the country. Otherwise, Catholic authorities reported a decrease in visa problems for Catholic priests during the period covered by this report.

Other Catholic sources indicate that most of the priests expelled in previous years, including Bishop Jerzy Mazur and Fathers Wisniewski, Mackiewicz, Stefano Caprio, and Krajnak, have been assigned to parishes outside the country and are no longer seeking visas to return. Unlike in past reporting periods, the Catholic Church reported no difficulties obtaining visas for clergy traveling to Krasnodar Kray.

The LDS Church reported few problems in the reporting period in securing visas for their foreign missionaries and reported that virtually all of their foreign missionaries have received one-year, multiple-entry visas.

There were few reports of religious workers of minority faiths having difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law. In the fall of 2002, Khabarovsk authorities attempted to deport two LDS missionaries for failing to register their visas, but the missionaries successfully appealed an unfavorable court decision and were able to complete their mission.

The LDS Church encountered some difficulties in securing residency permits for missionaries, but noted the difficulties varied from region to region and did not constitute a systemic problem. Authorities have never officially claimed that LDS Church missionaries practiced proselytism.

As of the end of the reporting period, Dan Pollard of the Vanino Baptist Church in Khabarovsk Kray had not been allowed to return to the country even though a judge in Khabarovsk issued an order in 2002 clearing him of any obstacles to entering the country. According to him, the Vanino church has been permitted to invite foreigners, but the invitation to him was denied.

In December 2003, the Unification Church reported that it appealed to the ECHR the Government's 2002 denial of a visa to church member Patrick Nolan. This case has not yet been ruled on. In 2003, Nolan lost both a trial court case and an appeal before the Supreme Court.

Missionaries with the Swedish Evangelical Church in Krasnodar, the OMS Christian organization, the Christian Church in Kostroma, and the Kostroma "Family of God" Pentecostal Church, who were denied visas in past years, did not return during the reporting period. In some cases, they were denied visa renewals after living there for up to nine years.

While most conscripts looking for exemptions from military service sought medical or student exemptions, the courts provided relief to some on the grounds of religious conviction. The question of conscientious objector status arose most frequently with respect to Jehovah's Witnesses, who submitted an update on May 24. As of that date, under the new legal regime governing alternative civilian service, 249 Witnesses had been recognized as conscientious objectors and deemed eligible for alternative civilian service. Approximately 36 Witnesses were denied alternative civilian service, in some cases because their applications allegedly were not filed in time. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, 47 criminal cases were initiated against members who claimed conscientious objector status, generally after a finding that the draftee's religious convictions were not genuine: 2 of the defendants were acquitted, 14 were convicted and 31 cases were still pending. The convictions have resulted in either a fine or community service. Approximately 53 Witnesses had filed civil claims against the decision to assign them to unsuitable alternate service. Two such claims have been upheld, 23 have been rejected, and 28 remain under consideration. Of the 249 Witnesses whose requests to perform alternative civilian service have been granted under the new legislation, 122 have not been able to perform it, as such service turned out to be either military-related, or for other reasons, such as unreasonably low wages or failure to provide adequate accommodation. Some of these have been offered different assignments in accordance with their religious convictions, but for others, their refusal to perform civilian service has been interpreted as draft evasion, a criminal offense.

Under the former legal regime governing alternative civilian service, which expired on January 1, 2004, members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported 40 court cases where conscripts defended their right not to serve in the military. Out of these 40 cases, 11 were adjudicated in favor of the objector, 6 against, and 23 cases were still ongoing. One refusal of exemption, in Bashkortostan, for Marsel Faizov, was upheld by the Supreme Court based upon a criminal conviction of the appellant. Criminal cases were brought against four Witnesses unsuccessfully seeking permission to perform alternative civilian service. Two of them were convicted of evasion of military service under Article 328(1) of the Criminal Code, one was acquitted and one case remains pending.

Some religious groups reported problems with religious properties. On March 21, a St. Petersburg court dismissed the Witnesses' suit seeking permission to remodel a building it owned on Garkavogo Street for use as a prayer center. The Witnesses had been litigating the matter since 1999 and now have no option other than selling the property and seeking an alternative site for their prayer center. A public meeting was held in Velikiy Novgorod in July 2004 to discuss the Jehovah's Witnesses application for permission to acquire land in the city on which to construct a lecture hall. Although members of the public present at the meeting responded favorably to the Witnesses' request, the city administration denied the Witnesses permission to acquire land. On April 20, the city administration informed the Witnesses that its denial was not subject to review. Following a March 2004 referendum in Sosnovy Bor (Leningrad Oblast), local authorities refused to let a Jehovah's Witnesses community use land to construct a place of worship. In the referendum, 90 percent of participants voted against the construction based on the reported referendum wording "What would you prefer to see built on this plot of land, a medical complex or a prayer house of Jehovah's Witnesses?" Since the referendum, the Witnesses have been searching in vain to find a site on which to build their prayer center.

In Khabarovsk, the regional Business Arbitration Court declared illegal the regional Ministry of Justice's 2003 registration of a private company as owner of a building that the local Jehovah's Witnesses community had already purchased. The Court also declared illegal the attempted covert sale of the building to the private company. The building is now a fully functional Kingdom Hall.

According to a May 2 article in the Perm newspaper *Permskiy Obozrevatel*, in late 2004, the Pentecostal New Testament Church in Perm purchased the local House of Culture from a private company to house its social and charitable activities. The purchase provoked considerable controversy in the community, reportedly fomented in part by the local ROC prelate, Bishop Irinarkh, a long-time critic of Pentecostals. Perm Mayor Arkadiy Kamenev threatened to initiate court proceedings to invalidate the purchase.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. A Moscow Baptist community has been unable to rent premises at a public library since 2003.

Contrary to previous reports, the Voronezh Lutheran Community reported no problems conducting religious services during the reporting period. The Lutherans have been discussing with local ROC representatives the return of their church building, although it is expected that this process will take considerable time to complete. Religious news sources reported that Orthodox churches not belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate, including the True Orthodox, have sometimes been prevented from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship.

The only Hare Krishna temple in Moscow, which was located in property slated for redevelopment, has been demolished, and the situation with the construction of a new temple has not been resolved. According to the Moscow Veda Cultural Center, in January 2004, Mayor Luzhkov signed a decree allocating land in northwest Moscow for construction of the first Veda temple in the country. According to city officials, as of the end of the reporting period, a plan for the design of the temple had been approved by the city, but questions regarding the legal ownership of the property still had to be resolved, due to recent changes in Moscow's property law; Orthodox groups have opposed the project. Members of the group, which is related to the Moscow Krishna Community, alleged that local officials were intentionally delaying the process. The community sought but was refused assistance from the Russian Inter-religious Council, an NGO composed of representatives of the four "traditional" religions; the Council's Executive Secretary called the Krishnas a "degrading sect." Interfax reported that the Inter-religious Council denounced an August 2004 campaign in which the Hare Krishnas gave vegetarian food to veterans and the homeless. Moscow authorities have not provided the Center with temporary facilities, but the Center has been successfully renting space in Moscow and the Moscow Oblast for gatherings and religious services.

According to press reports, in September 2004, representatives of the Aleksandr Nevsky Patriotic Society sought to disrupt a pre-approved demonstration organized by Hare Krishna members in Saratov, held in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan.

The Unification Church reported difficulties in establishing a Eurasian Church Center in Moscow to coordinate church activities in the region. The church planned to construct the center on property owned by an NGO affiliated with the Reverend Moon. On April 28, a local prosecutor ordered church officials to turn over for inspection documents relating to the property after the local administration received complaints from local citizens that a "totalitarian sect" was using the building. Eight police officers reportedly visited the property the next day in order to "investigate criminal activity." As of the end of the reporting period, there were no further developments in this matter; the police paid no further visits to the church, and the prosecutor did not contact the church again.

Citizens in Kaliningrad protested against the construction of a mosque, which the local Muslim community has been requesting since 1993. The ROC was involved in the talks to allow construction. While he claimed not to be against the mosque's construction, the local Bishop insisted that a small mosque rather than a large Muslim cultural center should be built in the suburbs, proportional to the small number of Muslims living in Kaliningrad. The Muslim community has been unsuccessful in negotiating an agreement with the local authorities. The Sova Center, a human rights NGO, reported in 2004 that Vladimir city authorities obliged the local Muslim community Mahallya to stop construction of a mosque due to violations of city construction regulations. The mosque was being constructed on private land near a house that was bought by community members and used as a temporary prayer house. City authorities filed suit in the Vladimir Arbitral Court demanding that the unauthorized building be demolished. Local Imam Rusham Myazitov called the local authorities' demands unjustified and noted that the land and building were private property. Earlier, the Vladimir Muslim community, numbering over 25,000 members, could not convince local authorities to allot a piece of land for construction of a mosque.

Restitution of religious property seized by the Communist government remained an issue. Many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, have been returned, although all four traditional religions continued to pursue some restitution cases.

The ROC appears to have had greater success reclaiming pre-revolutionary property than other groups, although it still has disputed property claims despite its preferential treatment. The ROC has a number of restitution claims in Yekaterinburg, including what is now the 1905 Square in the city center, where an Orthodox cathedral once stood. The ROC asserts there are still graves of clerics under the square's paving stones. Patriarch Aleksey II asked Moscow Mayor Luzhkov to give the ROC retroactive property tax benefits, which were cut in accordance with the new Tax Code. Accordingly, the Moscow City Duma passed a law in March 2004 returning approximately \$27,500 (approximately 800,000 rubles).

Forum 18 reported that an Old Believer community in Samara was still struggling to obtain restitution of a pre-revolutionary church. Municipal officials told the community that it should first ascertain the position of the ROC on restitution.

The Roman Catholic Community reports 44 disputed properties, most of which were properties used for religious services. The Catholic Church had no success in achieving restitution of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. The office of an oil company currently occupies the cathedral, and the Catholic parish is meeting in a former disco hall because it does not expect the company to vacate the premises. In Vologda, Catholic authorities have not succeeded in achieving restitution of a pre-revolutionary church that now houses a restaurant.

In 2003, Cossacks in Stavropol protested against the federal authorities' decision to turn a city art gallery back into a mosque

because it was located in the center of Stavropol. The Cossacks insisted that the mosque should be built in a different place. First Deputy Stavropol Administration Head Nikolay Zhukov assured the Cossacks and citizens of Stavropol that they had the administration's support. The local Muslim community insists that according to the 1993 law on returning religious property, the building should be returned to their community; however, opponents argue that the building has never been used for religious services and as it is located in the city center, early morning calls to prayer will wake citizens and will create vehicle and foot traffic as well as noise in an urban residential area. According to a March 2004 statement from the Council of Muslim Religious Organizations in Stavropol City, the region's arbitration court finally refused to hear a case set to decide the issue -- after seven months of preliminary deliberations -- on the grounds that it was "outside its competency." The local Muslim community was forced to file suit with the court in the first place, explains the statement, because the Stavropol Kray authorities repeatedly refused to acknowledge receipt of a 1999 instruction issued by the federal Ministries of Culture and State Property demanding the return of the former mosque to local Muslims.

Members of the Moscow Buddhist Community "Rinchen Ling" have not yet worked out a deal with Moscow city officials for compensation for their community space, from which they were evicted in 2004 and which was later demolished. The community received the building in 1997 for a 15-year beneficial rent. The community rejected several offers of replacement buildings, which they said were too small or unsuitable to their needs.

The Jewish community is still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The FJC reported that federal officials have been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, as have some regional officials, although some Jews assert that only a small portion of the total properties confiscated under Soviet rule has been returned.

There was no information indicating that officials returned a synagogue that was confiscated in Krasnodar in 1936. A news service reported in 2003 that regional authorities in Krasnodar officially refused to return the synagogue, arguing that there were no alternative locations to house the occupants (a youth radio school). In December 2004, the mayor of Sochi gave the Jewish community a parcel of land on which to construct a synagogue to replace the small structure now in use. Chabad Lubavitch still seeks return of the Schneerson Collection, a revered collection of religious books and documents belonging to the Lubavitcher rebbes. Since 2003 there has been a rabbi in permanent residence in Krasnodar.

Muslims in the Krasnodar Kray continued unsuccessfully to obtain authorization from the mayor's office to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi. Authorities continued to stall a local Muslim organization's plans to construct a new mosque, even though its rented premises barely accommodate the approximately 30 members who attend Friday prayers. According to the Krasnodar Kray's Department for Relations with Public Associations and Religious Organizations and Monitoring of Migration Processes, land can be allocated for the mosque only after a public opinion survey indicates that the proposed location would not cause a "conflict situation."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On April 14, a group of masked paramilitary troops stormed the Work of Faith Church in Izhevsk, Udmurtia, during an evening worship service. According to reliable reports from multiple sources, the troops led worshippers outside, where they searched them without a search warrant; some of the women were threatened with rape. Forty-six persons were detained, and some were held as long as 24 hours. Udmurtian officials later gave conflicting explanations of the incident, saying that the search was carried out because a suspect who had confessed to a recent murder said he had hidden some of the victim's belongings on the church grounds, and also because of reports that illegal migrants were living in the Work of Faith prayer house. Udmurtian officials alleged that 22 of the 46 persons detained were not properly registered, while church officials stated that only 12 were not properly registered, that these were homeless people or ex-convicts whom the church was sheltering in its social adaptation center, and that it was assisting such people to register with the authorities. The church officials added that the person identified as the murder suspect briefly had lived at the church's social adaptation center one and one-half years earlier but had since disappeared.

In response to a complaint by Rev. Igor Nikitin, President of the Association of Christian Churches of Russia, local authorities conducted an investigation of the Izhevsk incident. In letters to Rev. Nikitin dated May 17 and May 25, the authorities said that there had been no time to get a warrant prior to conducting the search as the courts were already closed for the day, and since the matter was urgent, they conducted the search on the order of the prosecutor, and that a court confirmed the prosecutor's order the following day. They said their investigation uncovered that the police had committed some procedural irregularities while the detainees were in custody, that the district police chief had received a warning because of the irregularities, that two other police officials had been reprimanded, and that a criminal investigation had been opened into the allegation that the police beat one of the detainees. Administrative charges were dropped against most, if not all, of the detainees.

In August 2004, the Khabarovsk newspaper "Amurskiy Meridian" reported that in March of that year, police in Khabarovsk detained and beat Sergey Sofrin, a local Jewish businessman, repeatedly insulting him with religious epithets. As of the end of the reporting period, contacts at the newspaper reported that although an investigation of the incident was conducted, the police involved were not disciplined.

There were no further developments in the case arising out of a 2003 anti-drug demonstration disrupted by city administrators and local police in the town of Liski, Voronezh Oblast, and in which police reportedly beat protesters. Two evangelical pastors, Andrey Bashmakov and Grigory Protsenko, organized the demonstration.

According to the Sova Center, a human rights NGO, nine female students were arrested during their reading of the Qur'an in a classroom at Kabardino-Balkariya State University. They used to meet several times a week for the reading. When arrested, the students were told that wearing hijab and group studying of the Qur'an violated university statutes, and that they would have to explain their behavior at militia headquarters. When they were brought to Nalchik city militia headquarters #2, they were reportedly searched and interrogated in a group and separately and detained for about eight hours. Although the students believed that it was an act of intimidation, they did not intend to file a lawsuit. The same source claimed that some Muslims in Moscow mosques had been detained prior to the March 2004 elections.

Authorities periodically arrested suspected members of the banned Islamic political movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), on the grounds that they conducted extremist and terrorist activities. According to the Sova Center, police broke up an HT cell in Chelyabinsk in March, and detained one of its members. Sova also reported that since December 2004, the authorities in Tatarstan initiated criminal cases on charges of extremism and terrorism against 11 members of radical organizations, including HT and Islamic Jamaat. Court hearings began in January in Nizhnevartovsk in the case of an HT member charged under Article 282-2 (participation in activities of an extremist organization) and Article 205-1 (involving third persons in committing a crime of terrorist nature) of the Russian Criminal Code. In December 2004, police in Izhevsk detained two individuals accused of distributing leaflets on behalf of HT. The trial started on May 4. In Tobolsk, Tyumen Oblast, proceedings in the case of nine HT suspects opened on February 15, but the Tobolsk City Court sent the case back to the regional prosecutor's office, asking it to specify more precisely the charges against the defendants. On May 24, the press reported that the prosecutor had complied with the court's request and that a new trial date would be announced in June. The Sova Center reported that the Tobolsk City Court resumed the HT hearing on June 20 behind closed doors. At the end of the reporting period, the witnesses were being questioned.

There were occasional reports of short-term detentions on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries for brief periods throughout the country, or asked them to cease their activities, such as displaying signboards, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. The Jehovah's Witnesses in particular reported a number of incidents in which its members were assaulted by other citizens or briefly detained by authorities while conducting lawful preaching activities. In August and September 2004, Moscow police reportedly detained eight Jehovah's Witnesses in three incidents.

On May 30, Moscow police detained ten congregants and supporters of the Emmanuel Pentecostal Church after breaking up a demonstration in front of City Hall. The Pentecostals were protesting discrimination against their denomination and, in particular, the alleged failure of city authorities to allocate a parcel of land on which they could construct a Pentecostal church. They assert that they had been trying to get permission to construct a church in Moscow since 1996 and that officials in one district of Moscow forbade them from building on a plot of land that the city had allocated for that purpose, and that officials in another district prevented them from renovating a building that the congregation had purchased for a church.

Members and supporters of the Emmanuel Church continued holding demonstrations virtually on a daily basis through the end of the reporting period. Demonstrators were arrested during at least two additional protests in early June. They asserted that their demonstrations were legal, as they had filed the requisite advance notice with city authorities. City authorities contended that the demonstrations were illegal, asserting that the city had responded to the protesters' advance notice by advising them to hold their protest at an alternate site. The protesters said they never received the city's response. Several protestors, including Emmanuel Church Pastor Aleksandr Purshaga, were charged with holding an illegal demonstration and sentenced to five-day jail terms.

In September 2004, an Initiativniki prayer house in Lyubuchany, Chekhov District, Moscow Oblast, burned down. This followed by several weeks efforts by security agencies, including local police and FSB officers, to intimidate participants in an open air gathering sponsored by the Lyubuchany church for several thousand Initiativniki from all over the central region. Press reports claimed that eyewitnesses placed some of the same law enforcement personnel at the church site minutes before the fire broke out. Although the official investigation attributed the fire to arson, no one has been charged in the incident. According to Forum 18, the building owner's requests for permission to rebuild went unanswered by local authorities. When the Baptists proceeded to start rebuilding anyway, local authorities filed suit to prevent it. Hearings scheduled on February 2 and April 19, on the local government's action were postponed, the latter one indefinitely, because local authorities failed to send a representative to court. As of mid-May, reconstruction of the church was nearly complete. The Baptists held several youth meetings in Chekhov in April and May that proceeded without interference by the authorities.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Izvestiya reported that on May 17, 2005, the Moscow city government decided to create a two-year, \$12.5 million (350 million ruble) program to promote interethnic tolerance.

As discussed in Section IV, federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of NGO-organized programs -- many sponsored by the U.S. Government -- to promote tolerance and the more effective handling of hate crimes.

The Jewish community has undergone a major institutional revival since the fall of the Soviet Union. In the past five years, the number of organized Jewish communities in the country has increased from 87 to over 200. During the reporting period, new synagogues were dedicated in Birobidzhan (Jewish Autonomous Oblast), Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg; and a Jewish school was opened in Kazan. The support of federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. Work began on the construction of a \$100 million complex, on land donated by the Moscow city government, that will house Jewish community institutions including a school, a hospital, and a major new museum devoted to the history of the country's Jews, the Holocaust, and tolerance.

During the reporting period, Volgograd's Voroshilovskiy District Prosecutor's office decided not to pursue a criminal case against the editor of the newspaper "Kolokol," accused of inciting ethnic hatred through a series of anti-Semitic articles. The MBHR had sought such a case, and the Volgograd Jewish community previously had appealed to city authorities for action on numerous occasions, without any follow-up. The prosecutor reportedly found that the statute of limitations had applied to one of the offending articles, making it too old to be prosecuted under the law and that the others did not meet sufficient cause of action under the hate crime laws.

Pursuant to a June 2004 decision by the Arbitration Court of Sverdlovsk Oblast, an anti-Semitic newspaper, "Russkaya Obshchina Yekaterinburga," closed down. According to Jewish leaders, there is no longer any anti-Semitic newspaper in the region, although the former editor-in-chief of the banned newspaper continues to play an active role in the region's Russian National Cultural Autonomy, an openly anti-Semitic organization.

Press reports in August indicate that the St. Petersburg Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Community has had its church returned; it had been confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1922.

Some minority groups were able to obtain restitution of their religious property. During the reporting period, a synagogue in Vladivostok and school buildings in Rostov-on-Don and Orenburg were returned to the Jewish community. In 2003, city authorities in Orel returned a synagogue to the Jewish community after years of petitions. There were no additional reports of problems concerning the property during the period covered by this report. The Buryat leaders of the traditional Buddhist Sangha (Organization) continue to occupy the oldest Buddhist temple in Europe, after having won back rights to the building from a private company in an earlier lawsuit.

In March 2004, Tula City Duma Deputies returned a church to the local Catholic community. The church was officially given to the Tula Catholic community in 1994, but the building was occupied by a forensic medical practice until 2003.

The delayed construction of the Roman Catholic Church in Pskov resumed in 2003 and the authorities have been cooperative. The exterior of the church has been completed and work is underway to complete the interior, with the church's consecration scheduled for 2007. Local authorities had delayed construction apparently due to ROC pressure.

In July 2004, the new Magadan Cathedral was consecrated and is in use. During the previous reporting period, it had been left unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Jerzy Mazur's absence, despite the arrival of the new Bishop, Kirill Klimovich.

After being repeatedly denied a visa for many years, the Dalai Lama received one and visited Kalmykia for three days in November-December 2004, where he consecrated a Buddhist temple and led religious services. Although a request has been passed to the Government, permission still has not been received for him to make a visit to Tuva.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that six cases were resolved recently in favor of members of the group who sought custody of their children; one was at the close of 2003, and five were in 2004 (three during the reporting period).

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Religious matters are not a source of pronounced societal tension or overt discrimination for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the ROC is at the heart of the national identity. Instances of terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya have given rise to negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it is often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices are the primary motivation. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and other minority religions, and some ROC leaders expressed similar views.

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialogue; however, some religious groups successfully collaborate on the local level on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialogues. Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the ROC, have been reluctant to support ecumenism. At the international level, the ROC has traditionally pursued interfaith dialogue with other Christian groups; however, the ROC criticized the Vatican's 2002 decision to upgrade its four apostolic administrations to dioceses. Individuals associated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continued to consider it a source of tension. On June 8, Patriarch Aleksey II sent a statement to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance meeting in Cordoba, Spain, in which, reportedly for the first time, he referred to anti-Semitism as a "sin."

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization continued to propagate hostility toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians. The RNE appears to have lost political influence in some regions since its peak in 1998, but the organization maintained high levels of activity in other regions, such as Voronezh.

According to an FJC report published on June 2, a court in Velikiy Novgorod convicted three RNE members of inciting ethnic and religious hatred. The leader of the RNE cell was sentenced to four years in prison and the two others received sentences of two and three years. According to the Sovo Center, on April 26, two RNE members from Bryansk Oblast were convicted and given suspended sentences on charges of inciting racial hatred after distributing RNE leaflets and videos in Orel. After the verdict was announced, RNE activities in Orel noticeably intensified.

A splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups; however, in several regions such as Moscow and Kareliya, the authorities have limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to their local affiliates. Despite losing its registration as a political party, the National Sovereign Party of Russia (NDPR) is still active. At a small, February 28, rally in Moscow, members distributed anti-Semitic publications and engaged in anti-Semitic hate speech. In March, a local prosecutor in Kamchatka initiated proceedings against a member of the party accused of distributing anti-Semitic leaflets. In 2004, NDPR activists distributed their newspaper, "Russian Front" in downtown Kostroma along with leaflets reading "Russia, liberate yourself from (ethnic slur) fascism."

The number of underground nationalist extremist organizations (as distinguished from such quasi-public groups as the RNE) appears to be growing. According to the MVD, neo-fascist movements have approximately 15,000 to 20,000 members, of which over 5,000 are estimated to live in Moscow. The Moscow Human Rights Bureau (MHBR) estimated the number of skinheads in the country at 50,000. Such groups exist in approximately 85 towns in the country. St. Petersburg is believed to have the largest number, an estimated 10,000 - 15,000, while Moscow is believed to have approximately 5,000 - 5,500. According to the MHBR, other cities with significant numbers of skinheads include Kaliningrad (approximately 1,000), Nizhniy Novgorod (between 600 and 2,500), and Rostov-on-Don (approximately 1,500). The primary targets of skinheads were foreigners and individuals from the North Caucasus, but they expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well. Typically, skinheads form loosely organized groups of 10 to 15 persons, and, while these groups do not usually belong to any larger organized structure, they tend to communicate through the hundreds of fascist journals and magazines that exist throughout the country, and increasingly on the Internet.

Hostility toward non-Russian Orthodox religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally physical attacks. The police investigation of the June 2004 killing of Nikolai Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, had not yet produced any suspects by the end of the reporting period. Shortly after Girenko was shot in his St. Petersburg apartment, a death threat appeared on the website of the nationalist group "Russian Republic." The group took responsibility for the killing; however, some experts believe the real killer may be one of the violent extremists incarcerated as a result of Girenko's testimony. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis. He was also involved in a program to promote religious and ethnic tolerance whose funding the Government recently canceled.

In connection with the April 2004 attack in Voronezh on human rights activist and anti-Semitism monitor Aleksey Kozlov, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that two young skinheads were arrested. The crime was treated as a misdemeanor and the nature of the punishment was unknown.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Discrimination persists largely because of ethnic nationalism among certain portions of the population, which is aggravated by the ongoing conflict in Chechnya and the terrorist acts it has prompted. The September 2004 school seizure in predominantly Russian Orthodox Beslan, North Ossetia, by terrorists believed associated with Islamic extremists, raised inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions in the region, but the expected backlash against the neighboring, predominantly Muslim, republic of Ingushetiya did not come to pass. Muslims have claimed that citizens in certain regions fear Muslims, citing cases such as a dispute in Kolomna, approximately 60 miles southeast of Moscow, over the proposed construction of a mosque.

Government officials, journalists, and the public have been quick to label Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Such sentiment has led to a formal ban on Wahhabism in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariya. NGOs in the country have noted that, especially after the events in Beslan, discrimination against Muslims has persisted without any intervention from the state authorities. Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers are generally harmonious. In Tatarstan, the authorities promote the liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam;" however, tensions occasionally

emerge in the republic and the surrounding Volga region. Law enforcement organizations closely watch Muslim groups. Officials often describe Muslim charitable organizations as providing aid to extremists in addition to their overt charitable work. Extremist versions of Islam, such as Wahhabism or Salafism, are often associated with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

Although the last reporting period saw the chairman of the Council of Muftis, the head of the Central Spiritual Board of the country's Muslims, and the head of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, jointly denounce terrorism, the national press has carried stories during the reporting period highlighting their public differences in attitudes toward Wahhabism, among other things.

On January 22, 10 tombs were desecrated in the Donskoye Muslim cemetery in Moscow. Two days later, militia detained two teenagers suspected of committing this act of vandalism. The investigators characterized the crime as "mere hooliganism" rather than a hate crime, and the suspects were not charged because of their age. No new desecrations were reported in Yekaterinburg or Sverdlovsk Oblast since the May 2004 desecration of two cemeteries there. No investigation results have been reported in those cases. In February, 26 tombs were desecrated in a Muslim cemetery in Yoshkar-Oly; witnesses claim to have seen 40 teenagers in the cemetery area. In 2003, a mosque in Bratsk, Irkutsk Region, was set on fire, and while regional authorities promised aid to the local Muslim community, it had not yet been provided, nor have the arsonists been found. Also in 2003, a Muslim cemetery in Chelyabinsk was desecrated and swastikas were painted on several tombstones, and a mosque in Usole-Sibirsk was firebombed during a worship service. No one was injured in the attack. No new information was available on the case at the end of the period covered by this report.

The "Tauba" mosque in Nizhny Novgorod continued to be a target for vandals' attacks. On January 25, swastikas were again painted on the mosque walls; it has been vandalized on repeated occasions. A local Islamic website said that Muslims might abandon the mosque out of fear of attack by neo-Nazis. The local Muslim Spiritual Administration has repeatedly appealed to local authorities to guard the mosque, but no measures have been taken. According to the Presidential Representative to the Volga Federal District, such acts of vandalism should be viewed as simple displays of a low level of culture, rather than national and religious extremism.

According to a local journalist, on several occasions, militiamen barred women wearing the hijab from Yekaterinburg's subway stations.

While many in the Jewish community claim that conditions for Jews have improved in recent history, primarily because there is no longer any official "state-sponsored" anti-Semitism and because the Jewish community has undergone a major institutional revival, anti-Semitic incidents against individuals and institutions continue to occur and violence is used with increasing frequency compared with the previous reporting period. Although the number of attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions remained relatively constant until late 2004, the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) reported an increase in late 2004 and the first months of 2005. The MBHR reported a total of 38 anti-Semitic incidents in the first quarter of 2005, compared with a quarterly average of 31 in 2004, a 22 percent increase. According to the MBHR, Moscow recorded the most anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, with 27, followed by Volgograd, Voronezh, Kaliningrad and Petrozavodsk, each with 5. The ADL reported that anti-Semitic incidents appeared to have become more violent in recent months. Crimes were mostly committed by young skinhead groups, whose numbers have increased from only a few dozen in 1992 to over 50,000 today. Anti-Semitic statements have sometimes been prosecuted.

Several hate crimes were reported against individual Jews in the Moscow Oblast during the reporting period. In December 2004, three young persons stabbed and seriously wounded a Jew who was riding on a tram in central Moscow, in what the MBHR characterized as a hate crime. The police detained three suspects but soon released two of them, who were later rearrested after a complaint by relatives of the victim. The MBHR reported that on January 1, a Jew was seriously beaten in a downtown Moscow metro station, in another apparent hate crime. On the evening of January 18, in two separate incidents that occurred 15 minutes apart, several Orthodox Jews were attacked by a group of skinheads while walking in the vicinity of Marina Roscha Synagogue. One of the victims was hospitalized for his injuries. The police arrested two suspects and charged them with hooliganism aggravated by racial hatred; they were convicted of disorderly conduct and inflicting bodily injuries and sentenced to four- and two-year sentences. The judge found there was not sufficient evidence to recognize racial hatred as an aggravating circumstance. After this incident, and at the request of Jewish leaders, Moscow authorities increased the police presence in the vicinity of Marina Roscha Synagogue, and no further incidents have been reported in the area.

Many Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the reporting period, in Kazan, Moscow, Saratov, Petrozavodsk, Makhachkala, Irkutsk, and St. Petersburg. The Jewish cemetery in Petrozavodsk was vandalized at least three times in 2004; a criminal investigation failed to identify the perpetrators. In late May, 2005, swastikas were painted on 26 Jewish tombstones in the Jewish section of Kazan's Arskoye Cemetery. The FJC reported that the authorities are investigating the incident as a hate crime and the Kazan City Council issued a statement condemning the attack. On May 14, Jewish graves at the Vostryakovskoye Cemetery, near Moscow, were desecrated. According to the FJC, law enforcement launched a criminal investigation and is treating the case as a hate crime, rather than simple hooliganism. Probably the most large-scale desecration occurred in St. Petersburg in December 2004, when 40 to 100 graves at the St. Petersburg Preobrazhenskoye (Jewish) Cemetery were vandalized. Unidentified perpetrators painted swastikas and Nazi signs on the gravestones. Nazi signs were also found on the cemetery's small synagogue. In the aftermath of the desecration, St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko met with the city's Chief Rabbi, Menachem-Mendel Pewsner, and promised a serious investigation of the crime; she later called him to inform him that the perpetrators had been arrested and the case would go to court. Matviyenko told Pewsner she considered religious tolerance to be an important issue and that she wanted to raise awareness in this regard. As of the end of the reporting period,

no further information was available about the case.

In January, a court in Velikiy Novgorod sentenced Yuriy Novikov to a 3-year prison term for having planted a fake explosive device near the city's synagogue in 2003. In the case of the March 2004 cemetery desecration in Kaluga Kray, four teenagers and two adults suspected in the vandalism were detained. In November 2004, three of the individuals, including one minor, were sentenced to two years' probation. The other participants were too young to be prosecuted.

Several synagogues and Jewish community centers were vandalized during the reporting period. On May 10, a fire which authorities considered a case of arson destroyed the historic synagogue of Malakhovka in the outskirts of Moscow. Several days earlier, there had been a burglary at the synagogue. The FJC reported that the same persons were suspected of both crimes and raised the possibility that the synagogue fire may have been set to destroy evidence related to the burglary, rather than as a hate crime. Nazi posters reportedly appeared in Petrozavodsk on April 20, the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, and two students were arrested five days later. The Jewish community center in the Moscow suburb of Saltykovka was hit by arson on January 1 and February 19. The ADL reported that the prosecutors are still investigating the cases. The synagogue in the Perovo district of Moscow was vandalized in January and again on February 15. In October 2004, a group of skinheads tried to enter the synagogue in Penza, but were stopped by congregants. A group of approximately 40 people armed with chains and iron clubs approached the synagogue later that day. The parishioners locked themselves inside and called the police. The ADL reported that the police detained two or three of the perpetrators and forced them to repair the damage they did to the synagogue.

There were no developments in the April 2004 cases of the beating of Ulyanovsk Jewish youth leader Aleksandr Golynsky and the vandalism by skinheads of the Ulyanovsk Jewish Center. The FJC reported that although suspects had been detained by community members and delivered to the police, they were later released. There also were no developments in connection with the 2003 attacks on the synagogues in Kostroma and Yaroslavl or the 2004 attack on the synagogue in Chelyabinsk.

A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that include anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim and xenophobic articles, many of which violate the law against extremism, are readily available throughout the country. Nevertheless, the production of this material continues, and the publishers are rarely prosecuted. For example, an anti-Semitic novel, "The Nameless Beast," by Yevgeny Chebalin, has been on sale in the State Duma's bookstore since September 2003. The xenophobic and anti-Semitic text makes offensive comparisons of Jews and non-Russians. According to the ADL, books sold in the Duma are not typically monitored for content. In cases where Jewish or other public organizations have attempted to take legal action against the publishers, the courts have been generally unwilling to recognize the presence of anti-Semitic content.

The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeds 100; many of them are sponsored by local chapters of the NDPR. The larger anti-Semitic publications, such as "Russkaya Pravda," "Vitaz," and "Peresvet," are easily available in many Moscow metro stations. Some NGOs claimed that many of these publications are owned or managed by the same local authorities that refuse to take action against offenders. In addition, there are at least 80 websites in the country dedicated to distributing anti-Semitic propaganda.

On April 7, "Velikolukskaya Pravda," a newspaper supported by the authorities in Velikiy Luki in Pskov Oblast, published an anti-Semitic article which the local prosecutor has begun investigating as a possible hate crime. Other examples of anti-Semitic hate speech included the painting of anti-Semitic graffiti on a synagogue in Samara on March 8, on Jewish community centers in Syktyvkar (Komi Republic) and Petrozavodsk in March, and on a synagogue in Perovo, Moscow Oblast, on February 15. In October 2004, anti-Semitic graffiti was found on the walls of buildings in Baltiisk, Kaliningrad Oblast, and in the city of Kaliningrad. In November 2004, on the anniversary of Kristallnacht, anti-Semitic graffiti was found on the headquarters of the Moscow-based "Holocaust Foundation." The newspapers "Rus Pravoslavnyaya" and "Za Russkoye Delo" published articles supporting the January 24, anti-Semitic appeal signed by 20 Duma deputies.

According to local representatives of the ADL, a St. Petersburg prosecutor initiated criminal proceedings against the publisher of the "Our Fatherland" newspaper, accusing it of hate speech.

In January, there were preliminary hearings arising out of the Article 282 criminal case initiated in Ulyanovsk in 2002 against the editor of the local newspaper "Orthodox Simbirsk," who ran a number of articles demonizing Jews. The FJC reported that the editor of the paper was fired, although the ADL noted that on March 14, Governor Morozov of Ulyanovsk promised to provide this paper governmental financial support in order to keep the paper from going bankrupt. In December 2004, a court in Novosibirsk convicted and sentenced the editor of "Russkaya Sibir," Igor Kolodezenko, to a two and one-half year suspended sentence for publishing anti-Semitic articles. Kolodezenko had been convicted of inciting ethnic hatred in 2000, but never served prison time, having been subject to the amnesty issued by the Duma on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the end of WWII.

Other non-Orthodox groups were also subject to attacks and harassment. No suspect has been identified in the 2003 attack on Pyatigorsk Catholic priest Steven Rogers. The local branch of the FSB joined the criminal investigation started by the local police department. According to Catholic authorities, Rogers continues to work in Pyatigorsk and has not experienced further problems. In October 2003, a Catholic cemetery was desecrated in Perm, and the authorities listed Satanists as the main suspects.

Tensions between the ROC and the Vatican continued during the reporting period, despite President Putin's visit to the Vatican in 2003. In addition to tensions over the Vatican's 2002 decision to upgrade its administrative units to dioceses, other issues of concern between the two groups include the possibility that the Holy See could recognize an Eastern-rite Ukrainian Catholic Patriarchate in Kiev, the ROC's continued negative perception that Roman Catholics proselytize across the country, and a

proposal by a local priest to open a small, three-room Catholic convent whose main mission would be to work with orphans in the city of Nizhny Novgorod. In February 2004, the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese of the ROC said this decision was considered by the ROC as an "a priori" unfriendly move. The Nizhny Novgorod Catholic parish insisted that the convent devoted to the Carmelite order was not going to perform missionary activities; however, the ROC argued that the Carmelite Order is known as the Catholic Church's most active missionary order. As of the end of the reporting period, Catholic sources asserted that the church never intended to and did not open a full-fledged convent in Nizhny Novgorod and that the controversy had been caused by a misunderstanding.

In February 2004, Roman Catholic Cardinal Walter Kaspar, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, met with Aleksey II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and Kirill, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who is the president of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of Foreign Ecclesiastical Relations, to engage in dialogue. During Kaspar's visit, Patriarch Aleksey told the press that the establishment of an Eastern rite Patriarchate in Kiev would ruin Orthodox-Catholic relations for decades. ROC leaders continue to publicly accuse Roman Catholics of coercing the Orthodox faithful into the Catholic Church, and in particular, of baptizing Orthodox orphans. As a result of Kaspar's visit, the two churches agreed to establish a joint working group, which met in May and September 2004, to consider some of the specific concerns of the two sides. Representatives of both churches reported that the working group contributed to an improved atmosphere. In an August 2004 gesture of reconciliation, Pope John Paul II returned to Patriarch Aleksey a treasured 18th-century copy of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan. The icon was taken from the country under unclear circumstances during communist times. A Catholic group purchased it and donated it to the Vatican in 1993. In May, Metropolitan Kirill met with newly-elected Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican, and the two leaders highlighted their commitment to working cooperatively.

Reports of the harassment of evangelicals and Pentecostals increased during the reporting period. According to the testimony of Boris Perchatkin of the American-Russian Relief Center at the April 14 Helsinki Commission hearing, during the reporting period, churches and prayer houses were vandalized or burned in Nekrasovskoye, Chelyabinsk, Bratsk, Izhevsk, Buryatiya, Oshkar Ola, Khalsk, and Podolsk. The October 2004 fire at the Pentecostal church in Podolsk represented the second time that church was attacked in 2004. Few, if any, of these crimes were prosecuted. The Sova Center reported on December 22, 2004 that the Pentecostal New Generation prayer house in Nekrasovskoe, Yaroslavl Oblast, was damaged by arson and robbed. No arrests were reported.

African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches have experienced prejudicial treatment, based apparently on a combination of religious and racial bigotry. One African-born Pentecostal pastor who was beaten and whose church building was burned in 2001 disbanded his congregation in 2003 due to continued threats and harassment.

According to the SCLJ, on April 30, the eve of Russian Orthodox Easter, a Baptist church in Chelyabinsk was firebombed. Local Baptists blame pejorative coverage in a news broadcast on a local television channel for fomenting anti-Baptist sentiment by characterizing the Baptists as a "totalitarian sect." According to church sources, after the fire, employees of the television station visited the church to apologize, saying they did not expect their report to have this effect. The station broadcast a retraction, saying that footage of a Baptist church service erroneously had been included in a report on "totalitarian sects" and that the Baptists were not such a sect. A press conference called by the pastor of the church and the local Baptist bishop received sympathetic coverage on all the local television channels.

There has been no progress in the investigation of the January 2004 explosion in a building belonging to a congregation of unregistered Baptists ("Initsiativniki") in Tula. The authorities have long been suspicious of the Initsiativniki, whose complete refusal to cooperate with the Soviet authorities led to their split in 1961 from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The Tula Baptist community believed the explosion was a terrorist act, as community members had been receiving threats from unknown persons. Although local law enforcement authorities attributed the explosion to a natural gas leak, the local gas company reportedly found no gas residue at the site.

In Yekaterinburg, members of Pravoslavnoye Bratstvo (Orthodox Brotherhood), a youth group founded by the missionary department of Yekaterinburg's Russian Orthodox Diocese, continued to picket Sunday services at Protestant churches, as they have for much of the last six years. The Orthodox Brotherhood picketers have been joined recently by members of City Without Drugs, a foundation which media reports have linked to the Uralmash organized crime group. The picketers distributed leaflets describing Protestant churches as "dangerous, totalitarian sects," and accused members of these churches of torturing and even killing children. Picketers beat some members of Protestant congregations, following them after church services. The Orthodox Archbishop of Yekaterinburg accused local Protestant groups of engaging in "espionage disguised as religious activities." In April, at the request of Protestant leaders, Yekaterinburg city officials began denying permission to groups who wished to picket outside Protestant churches. Local Protestants reported improvement in the situation since the ban on picketing, however, a June 16 report from the Interfax Ural news service stated that the Yekaterinburg Orthodox diocese asked the city to lift this ban on picketing.

On March 23, a group of anti-Evangelical activists tried to hold an open-air rally outside a school in Yekaterinburg, to demand that city authorities evict the New Life Church from its building. When the rally's organizer was unable to show police a permit to hold an outdoor demonstration, a scuffle ensued and the organizer and his companions were detained. They were released shortly afterwards and the police officer and prosecutor involved in their detention were fired, with police officials subsequently apologizing to Yekaterinburg's ROC Archbishop Vikentiy for the organizer's arrest. Duma Deputy and former City without Drugs leader Yevgeniy Roitman asserted to the press that the New Life Church had bribed the police to detain the rally organizer. Roitman, Yekaterinburg City Duma Deputy and current head of City without Drugs Andrey Kabanov, and others participated in a March 27 picket in front of the New Life Church.

LDS Church leaders confirmed press reports that in August 2004, a local Cossack group organized a protest against plans for the construction of a meetinghouse in Saratov city. Muslim and ROC leaders also spoke out against the construction. Although the church had received construction permits for the project, the city stopped construction, and has not permitted it to resume.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are still referred to routinely in the press as a religious "sect," although they have been present in the country for approximately 100 years. In November 2004, the Committee for the Salvation of Youth from Totalitarian Sects filed a claim with the Prosecutor General seeking the dissolution of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. According to the Witnesses, other persons and entities have sent similar letters and complaints to the Federation Council and the Prosecutor General. A common prejudice circulating among the general public is that members of Jehovah's Witnesses are "spies of imperialism." In January 2004, the governor of Stavropol Kray compared members of Jehovah's Witnesses to Wahhabis. This comparison resonated particularly strongly in Stavropol, an area that has been attacked by Chechen separatists.

During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported at least three incidents in Moscow and St. Petersburg alone in which residents attacked Witnesses while they were preaching in apartment buildings; the authorities did not take any action against the assailants. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the management of a Yekaterinburg stadium in which a Jehovah's Witnesses convention was being held interrupted the convention, forcing thousands of participants to leave the stadium. A Kingdom Hall was picketed in Stravropol in December 2004. In 2003, a meeting of 15,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses in St. Petersburg was almost disrupted when police initially refused to provide protection against "anti-cult" activists who protested the event. In response to a request for help, police tried to cancel the event, claiming the group lacked documentation, but ultimately permitted it to take place.

After nearly 2 years of criminal proceedings, Sakharov Center Director Yuriy Samodurov and staff member Lyudmila Vesolovskaya were found guilty on March 28, of inciting religious hatred and were fined approximately \$3,750 (100,000 rubles) each. The two convictions were under appeal as of the end of the reporting period. The third defendant, artist Anna Mikhachuk, was acquitted of all charges. The charges stemmed from a provocative 2003 exhibit of religious-themed art entitled "Danger, Religion!" which roused the ire of the ROC and was defaced by vandals claiming the exhibit offended their beliefs. Many human rights activists welcomed the relatively light sentence. Nonetheless, the verdict set a troubling precedent, leaving room for the state and the ROC to define parameters for religious and artistic expression. Those who vandalized the exhibit were never charged with a crime. Agence France Presse reported in March that Samodurov sued the vandals, who were found not liable.

The SCLJ and evangelical leaders asserted that opponents of "nontraditional" religions in the Government and in majority faiths increasingly used the mass media, conferences and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions. According to the SCLJ, on May 10-11, the Saratov diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Saratov State University, and the regional government organized a conference entitled "Neo-Pentecostal Sects in Russia: A Threat of Religious Extremism." The conference's final document characterized neo-Pentecostal sects as being dangerous for the physical and spiritual health of individuals and for national security. Speakers associated with the ROC took part in antisect conferences and meetings around the country.

In June 2004, the Izhevsk newspaper "Infopanorama" published an article that slandered the pastor of that city's Work of Faith Evangelical Church. After the SCLJ's intervention, the newspaper published an apology. In an ongoing case arising out of articles published in 2003 in the Yeysk (Krasnodar Kray) newspaper Priazovskiye Step'i, the journalist who wrote the articles reportedly testified that local Seventh-day Adventists used a Bible written with human blood and covered with human skin. As of the end of the reporting period, this case was ongoing. According to the SCLJ, the Krasnodar Kray Prosecutor General refused to initiate a criminal investigation, as requested by the Adventists, into a local television station which broadcast the allegation that the local Adventist congregation conducted a number of ritual murders each year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, a number of religious groups, NGOs, and others in a steady dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok were active throughout the period in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom. U.S. Government officials engaged a broad range of officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. In the period covered by this report, such contacts included government officials, representatives of all traditional and many nontraditional religious confessions, the SCLJ, the Esther Legal Information Center, the Anti-Defamation League, lawyers representing religious groups, journalists, academics, and human rights activists known for their commitment to religious freedom.

The Embassy and consulates have worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the Presidential Administration and the Government, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials have responded by investigating some of those cases and by keeping Embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the Embassy and consulates maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the MOJ, Presidential Administration, and MFA.

The Embassy addresses religious freedom by maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities. Two

positions in the Embassy's political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with other U.S. officers in Moscow and other U.S. Consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely assist American citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; these officers are sensitive to any indications that these cases involve possible violations of religious freedom. Such issues are raised regularly in meetings with the Consular Department of the MFA and with the MVD. As American missionaries and religious workers comprise a significant component of the local American citizen population, the Embassy conducts a vigorous outreach program aimed specifically at this population in order to provide consular services and to maintain contact for emergency planning purposes. In the course of this outreach program, Embassy officers inquire about the missionaries' experiences vis-à-vis immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He attended events on major religious holidays and often met with a range of religious leaders from various denominations. He hosted discussions on religious freedom with the leaders of major religious denominations and hosted a Passover Seder for local contacts.

The U.S. Government presses for the country's adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious freedom, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organizations, the Esther Legal Information Center, the SCLJ, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations.

On April 14, members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission held a hearing in Washington on the treatment of minority religious groups in the country. Several members of Congress made statements urging the Government to respect human rights and religious freedom. Witnesses testified about patterns of abuse toward religious minorities and restrictions on religious freedom, especially Protestants and Muslims, the latter due to registration requirements and suspicion of Muslims as terrorists.

Members of the staffs of the Consulate Generals in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities in their consular district. During the reporting period, the U.S. Consulate General in Yekaterinburg maintained a particularly active outreach program to the Muslim community of the Urals. The Consul General in Yekaterinburg hosted Ifars for Muslim contacts in three cities in the Urals to celebrate Ramadan, and Consulate officials visited numerous mosques and madrassahs within the consular district. Two American speakers on Islamic issues visited six major Ural cities, and an exhibit featuring mosque architecture in the U.S. was displayed in seven cities, with the Ambassador hosting the exhibit's opening in Tyumen.

In June-July 2004, the Embassy and Consulate General Yekaterinburg coordinated and funded a 3-week summer camp for 70 children from the predominantly Muslim city of Ufa, Bashkortostan. The summer camps promoted English language skills, leadership skills, an understanding of American culture, as well as interethnic tolerance and understanding among the predominantly Muslim children. Based on the success of this model, four more camps are scheduled for summer 2005, two in Ufa and two in Kazan; one of the camp sessions in each city is planned to begin in June, the other in July.

The U.S. Government has funded translation and publication of several important books by U.S. authors and the Embassy distributed 29 sets of over 100 books on democracy, freedom of expression, tolerance, and human rights.

The U.S. Government organized exchanges under the International Visitor program with a focus on religious freedom issues. In September 2004, the Consulate General in Yekaterinburg sent a group of 10 primarily Muslim community and religious leaders from the Urals to the United States on a program entitled "Promoting Multiculturalism in Civic Life." As a result of this program, one participant, a television producer, devoted an episode of her television show "Islam Today" to religious freedom in the U.S. and, along with another participant, founded the "Interethnic Information Center," which follows media coverage of ethnic and religious minorities and works to educate journalists and government officials on tolerance issues.

In March, the Consulate General in Yekaterinburg supported an academic conference on ethnic and religious tolerance at Orenburg State University. The conference drew participants from throughout the country and Kazakhstan. The Mufti of Orenburg Oblast and the head of the Orthodox Church in Orenburg both participated in the conference.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to \$24,000 -- approximately 672,000 rubles) grants program supporting local NGOs working on a range of issues, approved 9 tolerance-related grants totaling approximately \$79,000 (approximately 2,212,000 rubles).

In 2004-05, the U.S. continued to support through a grant the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal's "Climate of Trust" program, which focuses on forming and strengthening Regional Tolerance Councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. Ethnic and religious leaders, local government officials, and NGO representatives participated in the Councils. In September 2004, the grantee organized a conference on combating hate crimes in Ryazan for representatives of the Volga Federal District; this followed a 2003 conference for over 100 students and cadets of the Ryazan branch of the Moscow University of the MVD. In May, a similar conference was held in Ryazan for activists of the Stavropol Kray Regional Tolerance Councils. As the result of the program, tolerance courses for militia cadets were introduced in the St. Petersburg Law Institute of General Procuracy and the Ryazan Branch of the Moscow Academy of the MVD. Tatarstan's regional Ministry of Education

signed an agreement in which it pledged to include tolerance courses in continuing education programs for school teachers.

The U.S. supported two additional tolerance projects through the PartNER (Partnerships, Networking, Empowerment, and Roll-out) program, which ended in December 2004. One of these projects, the Ural NGO Support Center (UNGOSC), worked to encourage public discussion of ethnic and religious tolerance in Perm by working with 58 media outlets to publicize project activities and conduct a training program for journalists to promote more responsible media coverage on racial and ethnic issues. Twenty-seven specialists who received training on tolerance issues reached more than 550 teenagers and raised their awareness of interethnic and interreligious issues. In December 2004, UNGOSC staged a weekend camp in Perm for 20 teenagers who represented different ethnic and religious communities. Over the life of the project, UNGOSC worked with over 200 organizations to publicize program activities, recruit training participants and stage public awareness campaigns and seminars. UNGOSC and its American partner organization Legacy International designed and published 2,500 brochures and posters that were disseminated during public awareness campaigns.

The other tolerance project supported under the PartNER program was conducted at the Volga Humanitarian-Theological Institute in Nizhny Novgorod, which provided representatives of government and religious organizations with a series of seminars to educate participants and help them focus their thoughts and ideas on religious policy issues. The activity of religious communities in the Volga Federal District increased as a result of this project. For example, in Tatarstan, program participants held a conference on the role of religious organizations in social policy. Representatives of various religious communities and government officials took part. The conference aided the religious organizations in uniting their efforts to assist street children, migrants, and other people in difficult situations. Participants also established a website to serve as a virtual resource center for state officials and community leaders. One direct result of the project was further refinement of the proposal to change federal legislation concerning the regulation of religion that was submitted to the Committee on Religion Affairs of the State Duma.

In June-July, U.S. Government grantee Southern Russia Resource Center (SRRC), in partnership with the Tolerance Institute, conducted seminars for 60 participants from North Ossetiya, Chechnya and Ingushetiya, promoting models for how to prevent and address such problems as xenophobia, cultural ignorance and interethnic conflict. Participants included NGO leaders, journalists, youth leaders and regional and local government officials.

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